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SUBJECT: MOSCOW CITY DUMA AMENDMENTS FAVOR A UNITED RUSSIA
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[11](#). (SBU) Summary: The Moscow City Duma amended Moscow's Election Code on June 17, strategically changing the rules for its own elections. These measures set up a voting structure that favors United Russia's continual dominance in the October 11, 2009 Moscow City Duma elections. Key legislative changes include announcing early elections, increasing the number of single-mandate seats from 15 to 17, introducing the controversial "Imperiali" method of distributing seats, and lowering the threshold from ten to seven percent. In the absence of radical change, we expect another round of sham elections, with opposition groups occupying some seats since, by law, United Russia is not allowed to fill them all. End Summary.

Moscow City Duma Reverses Course on Election Date

[12](#). (SBU) On March 31, the Moscow City Duma had announced that in light of the economic crisis, elections would be held in March 2010. On June 17, subsequent to Moscow Mayor Yuri Luzhkov proposing new amendments to the Moscow Election Code, the Moscow City Duma unexpectedly changed the elections from March 2010 back to October 2009. Again, the Duma used the loophole contained in Article 37.2 of Russia's Federal law "On Basic Guarantees of Electoral Rights," which allows for flexibility in setting the date of the elections (reftel). Early elections also mean that the current Moscow City Duma deputies' terms will be shortened from the normal four year period.

[13](#). (SBU) Early elections disadvantage opposition groups since they now have less time to collect money and to campaign. Ilya Yasin, a member of the opposition Federal Political Council and a "Solidarity" movement leader told us June 19 that the Moscow City Duma elections are crucial for opposition parties, but he expressed concern that Solidarity has little time to raise the necessary money. On June 10, Boris Nadezhdin, a former State Duma Deputy and the Right Cause Party's Moscow Regional Representative, told us that "Luzhkov knows the United Russia party will be weaker in March 2010," and he thought that United Russia knows they should seize the opportunity now to stay in power through earlier elections. On June 19 Galina Mikhaleva, Executive Secretary of the Political Committee of the Yabloko opposition party, argued that any opposition party winner "really depends only on who the Kremlin picks."

Structural Changes Provide United Russia an Advantage

[14](#). (SBU) The Moscow City Duma has 35 deputies. In the current Duma, there are 15 single-mandate seats, representing each of Moscow's voting districts. Currently these are all filled by United Russia deputies. The 20 proportional seats

include 13 deputies from the United Russia party, four deputies from KPRF, and three deputies from Yabloko. In accordance with changes to Moscow's Election Code, the number of single-mandate seats will increase from 15 to 17, thus allowing United Russia to pick up easily two more seats and further reduce the opposition parties' chances of winning seats in the legislature. Aleksandr Kynev, an expert at the International Institute of Humanitarian Political Research told us June 19 that the Moscow authorities "fear that the electoral results will go out of control, so they increased the number of single-mandate seats."

15. (SBU) Liliana Shibanova, the Executive Director of GOLOS, an NGO that monitors elections, told us on June 30 that the method of distributing seats in the Moscow City Duma also favors United Russia. The June 17 changes introduced a controversial "Imperiali" method of distributing seats in the Moscow City Duma, which applies to the party list vote, and allows the winning party to gain one or two additional seats at the expense of the smallest parties who do not make it over the threshold. According to The Moscow Times, "a Belgian clerical and rightist political activist invented the Imperiali formula in 1921 as a way to push leftist and secular politicians out of municipal elected bodies," but even Belgium itself is drafting legislation to scrap this method.

Cosmetic Measures to Comply with Federal Legislation

16. (SBU) The final legislative amendment, lowering the threshold from ten to seven percent, was required to make

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city and federal election laws correspond. This change could potentially help opposition candidates who might not reach the ten percent barrier, but could manage to obtain seven percent. In the last elections in 2005, only the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (KPRF) and Yabloko passed even the smaller seven percent threshold. However, Vladimir Zhirinovskiy's nationalist Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR) garnered eight percent, so this new measure may allow LDPR and others to participate in the next Moscow City Duma.

Luzhkov Tops United Russia's Party List

17. (SBU) Yuri Luzhkov, Moscow's mayor for the last 18 years, has announced his intention to top the United Russia party list for the Moscow City Duma elections, using his name recognition to draw United Russia voters and to ensure that candidates obtain seats in the Duma. Rumors have revived about Luzhkov's resignation and there is new speculation that Deputy Prime Minister Sergey Ivanov could succeed Luzhkov after the elections. According to Shibanova, "these are just rumors and there is no concrete information to indicate otherwise." The Kremlin has been cautious about taking on Russia's most powerful mayors, in fear of undermining effective management during the economic crisis. The relations between Luzhkov and the Kremlin are essential to the elections since they have the power to determine which candidates are allowed to run and which to eliminate from the party lists.

Comment

18. (SBU) All indications point to a United Russia sweep in the elections. Shibanova maintained that United Russia would lose the crucial majority only in the unlikely event that three opposition parties were to gain significant access to the Moscow City Duma. Based on discussions with opposition leaders, we think that United Russia will take most, if not all, of the single-mandate seats and most of the proportional ones, plus use its new Imperiali powers to add gravy. KPRF will likely come in second, maintaining about four

single-mandate seats. As an unregistered party, Solidarity is unable to run for proportional seats, but while the group is strategizing to divide the single-mandate districts among the opposition candidates it has little or no chance of winning seats this way.

19. (SBU) Yabloko's current three proportional seats appear to be up for grabs. Yabloko is unlikely to run for single-mandate spots due to financial constraints, but will battle Right Cause, Just Russia, and LDPR for the remaining proportional seats. During the last elections, Yabloko united with the Union of Right Forces (SPS) and made it into the Moscow City Duma as a United Democrats faction, but this year we do not expect such a collaboration. Right Cause is a new party backed by the Kremlin made up of the remnants of SPS, so it represents competition for Yabloko.
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